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ABSTRACT

In studying the state of the private sector of higher education, the data most often used have been economic in substance. The question is raised whether or not such factors as academic excellence, concern for human scale and individual personality, commitment to liberal learning, the college's role as a sanctuary of academic freedom, and its position as a standard setter shouldn't also be considered carefully. At Saint Mary College, whose mission is to provide for the Catholic liberal education of women, an outstanding evaluation team was brought in to assess the college's apostolic effectiveness within the religious community. The study evidenced that education for religious and ethical values and liberal education for full human development remain a strong foundation from which Saint Mary can respond to new challenges. The value of the Saint Mary case study as a possible model for evaluation of so elusive a goal as spiritual progress may be in the manner in which the independent team established and applied criteria to the college. (Author/MSE)

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NO HOLLOW VICTORY: MEASURING THE SPIRITUAL PROGRESS OF THE INDEPENDENT COLLEGE -- A CASE STUDY

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NO HOLLOW VICTORY: MEASURING THE SPIRITUAL PROGRESS OF THE INDEPENDENT COLLEGE -- A CASE STUDY

Introduction

In a recent report on the state of health of the independent sector of higher education, Bowen and Minter outline a program of data collection and objective analysis designed to present a comprehensive and reliable evaluation of the condition of the private sector.[1] The purpose of their project is to monitor regularly the progress of private higher education by providing reliable and timely information for use by government, educators and other groups interested in the private sector.

If conclusions of the Bowen-Minter report are arranged in a field of restraining and supporting forces, the general impression is that private higher education exists in a state of tension. In the private sector enrollments have been maintained despite the tuition differential; the financial position of the private sector has held remarkably steady; leadership in most private institutions has maintained a cautiously confident stance toward the future despite financial stringency and a slow erosion of financial and educational strength which has been coupled with intense competition for student enrollment.

Reflecting on the Bowen-Minter report, one must acknowledge the contribution it makes to consolidating data on economic and financial progress in the private sector. But at the same time as I eagerly measured my own institution against the indicators of institutional distress sketched by the authors, I was intrigued by their admission of the limitations of their research for considering one major issue facing private higher education:

> "This is the question of whether, in the struggle for survival, the basic integrity of private colleges and universities is threatened. With the growing intensity of competition for students and funds, are they being forced to respond

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[1] Howard R. Bowen and W. Jon Minter, Private Higher Education: First Annual Report on Financial and Educational Trends in the Private Sector of American Higher Education, (Washington: Association of American Colleges), 1975.

> to market forces in ways that impair their distinctiveness, their academic excellence, their concern for human scale and individual personality, their commitment to liberal learning, their role as a sanctuary of academic freedom, their position as standard-setters? It would be a hollow victory if the private sector were to survive and even prosper financially at the expense of giving up the characteristics that make their survival important... . Perhaps in future years, our study may yield some information on what might be described as spiritual progress of the private sector as distinguished from financial progress."[2]

Such a direction for further study is imperative given the claims for private higher education's indispensible role in the American higher educational system. Independent colleges must concern themselves with measures of spiritual as well as economic progress if they are to continue to stand for values such as commitment to liberal learning, concern for human scale and individual personality, building a community of persons, and integration of religious belief, learning and behavior.

Statement of Purpose

This paper reports on the attempts of one independent college as it designed and carried out a measure of spiritual progress. In this case the focus on spiritual progress related to one dimension of the college's mission, that of "apostolic effectiveness". Criteria for measuring apostolic effectiveness were delineated and applied to the institution by an independent evaluative team, who drew conclusions and made recommendations on alternative future directions for the College. Perhaps this self-assessment model will be helpful to other private institutions seeking to estimate relative spiritual progress as they experience a squeeze on material resources and pressure to broaden services.

The Setting

Traditionally, the mission of Saint Mary College is to provide for the Catholic liberal education of women. Saint Mary is committed to the ideal of Christian education articulated by the Sisters of Charity (who own and operate the College) as

"one of the great acts of charity, for it is service to others at the fullest

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[2] Ibid, p.79.

> point of their needs, ministering to the person's need to know, to come to truth, to be freed from ignorance and prejudice, to be opened to the good and the beautiful, to understand the past and be enabled to confront and help shape the future, to be, in a word, more fully, and completely human and Christian."[3]

Today, Saint Mary continues to evolve in its dedication to Christian education. Society, the Catholic Church, the roles of women are evolving more rapidly and radically than ever before in modern history, presenting new challenges to continuous renewal of mission.

The real question in any change of services revolves around basic purpose. Is such evolution a response to financial pressure, a movement of survival or an outward adaptive thrust of the college's mission?

The Study

The press for evaluating spiritual progress at Saint Mary College, a Catholic liberal arts college for women, came from the religious community that owns and operates the college. The religious community was engaged in a self-assessment seeking to estimate the relative apostolic effectiveness of its many forms of apostolic service. The pressure for re-deployment of personnel and more effective use of scarce resources is obvious given the simultaneous shifts within the Catholic Church and society, over against a diminishing pool of personnel and material resources within the religious community.

As a consequence, the religious community sought to evaluate the relative apostolic effectiveness of their many forms of apostolic service by asking four key questions:

- Are these forms of apostolic service consistent with the mission of the community?
- Are each of these forms of service apostolically effective?
- Do the results achieved meet the legitimate expectations of the Congregation?
- What new and creative ways are there to revitalize our apostolic work and witness?

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[3] Living in Charity: directives of the eleventh general chapter of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, 1973-74, norm 4.9, p. 20.

Within the general design of this community-wide "apostolate study", (the name hereafter given to this particular measure of spiritual progress), the Saint Mary College study developed in three parallel ways:

(1) opportunities for personal and communal reflection on the college's mission;

(2) preparation and compilation of descriptive data on the College. Data collected were very similar to measures used in the Bowen-Minter study;

(3) an independent, objective evaluation of the apostolic effectiveness of the college by an outside team.

The Independent Evaluation

The tool of independent evaluation proved a valuable measure of spiritual progress. Conscious that evaluation can be a subjective process, resting on a series of assumptions which color the effort, the College sought an independent evaluation team to attempt an independent measurement, one free of the vested interests which are part of any institution and one which might raise issues which otherwise might not surface. The evaluators were asked by the administration to help assess the impact of the college's services. They were also to serve as an impartial available channel by which persons at the college might speak freely to the issues. Finally, they were to bring trained, experienced and objective insight to bear on the questions of the college's apostolic effectiveness.

The independent evaluative team made an initial visit to campus during the summer, 1975, studied all pertinent documents, and materials related to the study, the college, and the religious community, and reviewed all data prior to an extended visit to campus in late August and mid-September.

The team, then, conducted extensive interviews during two three-day campus visits. Interviews included members of the Board of Control, the college administration, faculty and staff (both religious and lay, tenured and untenured, and from different age groups), students (in groups and at random), and representatives of the Community's other apostolic services.

The team visited with the members of the Congregation in each of the five community living groups at the college. They were present as observers during the Fall Faculty Institute; as well as during a day-long "faith-sharing" experience for the Sister-members of the faculty and staff.

Criteria Used

From "To Teach As Jesus Did," a pastoral message on Catholic education by the U.S. Catholic bishops, the evaluative team deduced the following criteria for apostolic effectiveness:[4]

- How well it enables men to hear the message of hope contained in the Gospel?
- to base their love and service of God upon this message?
- to achieve a vital personal relationship with Christ?
- and to share the Gospel's realistic view of the human condition which recognizes the fact of evil and personal sin while affirming hope?
- how well it helps the Catholic community to see the dignity of human life with the vision of Jesus?
- and to involve itself in the search for solutions to the pressing problems of society?

In the same document expectations of higher education also include commitment to the Christian tradition:[5]

- to explore the distinctively Catholic patrimony;
- to serve the Church by deep and thorough study of Catholic beliefs in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom and according to canons of intellectual criticism which should govern all pursuit of truth.

From the religious community's governing documents, certain norms for judging apostolic effectiveness and setting future directions were also employed as criteria. Stated in the form of questions, these were:[6]

- To what extent is this work a vital Christian force; an effective Christian presence? How clearly does this work speak the gospel message?

- To what extent does this work constitute a Christian community which effects the community in the area served?

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[4] To Teach As Jesus Did: A Pastoral Message on Catholic Education, National Conference of Catholic Bishops. (Washington,D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1973), norm. 10.

[5] Ibid., norm 64.

[6] Living in Charity, norm. 4.14.

- To what extent does the work fulfill its professional purpose, i.e., How good is it? What is the quality of its services?

- How is this work related to the statement that "The Sisters of Charity offer their services to the poor and for the poor?"

- Is this service making an essential contribution in meeting the needs of the times?

- What is the relationship between this effort and the desires and abilities of the community members? Is this the best possible utilization of the member's services and talents?

- Does the community have the resources to carry on this work effectively?

- What would be the effect if this particular service were no longer offered? What are the alternatives?

Using data collected by the college's office of institutional research and their own observations, the independent evaluative team first described the college. They critically observed the typical student body attracted to Saint Mary, enrollment changes, etc.

Using the criteria above, the independent evaluators then considered Saint Mary College

A. as a vital Christian presence

B. as a Christian community

C. as an effective educational enterprise.

They studied Saint Mary College's contribution to the needs of the times, the religious community's resources, and suggested possible future alternatives for the college.

The College as a Vital Christian Presence

Reflecting on the meaning of renewal in the Catholic Church as directed by Vatican II, the team described it as a call to the Church to be a new presence to the world. The Church is seen as a pilgrim people on a quest to adapt the culture of our times to the message of the Gospel, finding people where they are, building the Kingdom in collaboration with men of good will, valuing diversity as a creative font of unity.[7]

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[7] Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1964, norms 57 and 46.

The assumption is that this presence values harmony, recognizes lawful diversity and promotes dialogue. That Christian presence in our modern world carries with it an obligation of working with all persons in constructing a more human world. That the presence of the Church in our modern world addresses itself to the dignity of the human person and to the special needs of this present age.

In examining the two modes of presence appropriate to the educational services of the Sisters of Charity, direct teaching and indirect proclamation, the team concluded that there is no question but that Saint Mary College has many external signs of the proclamation of the Gospel. The close ties between faculty members and students, particularly with the religious on the faculty, are apparent. Saint Mary College is a Catholic college, they concluded, "not only in name but by explicit commitment reinforced by structure."

In examining the image which Saint Mary projects, the team noted that like all Catholic institutions trying to renew with Vatican II, Saint Mary is in tension around issues that make it difficult to make operative the values espoused of internal harmony, creative diversity and dialogue. They asked the question:

> "Is diversity and pluralism within the college valued as a source of creative energy?"

Since diversity and pluralism are the product of human limitations, both in terms of knowledge and freedom, since we are never all we want to be and we never know the whole of reality, the existence of diversity and pluralism call for an openness to dialogue, valuing persons with their differences.

Because "within the fundamental unity of faith there is room for cultural differences, forms of expression and theological views",[8] they concluded that at Saint Mary College there is:

> a real need for processes by which issues can be faced and differences handled so that a creative result can be achieved.

The team also observed that the college is characterized by some degree of

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[8] To Teach as Jesus Did, norm. 18.

"isolation", with both positive and negative meanings attached. They commend Saint Mary's moving outward in the work at surrounding prisons and continuing education.

We were encouraged to ask: With the human and other resources available, in what ways could we use these resources so that they render "to Christ in the person of our neighbor every corporal and spiritual service in our power" -- a stated ideal of the religious community that owns and operates the college.

In order to counteract the economic and political naiviety of our students, the team suggested that philosophy, theology, and the socio-economic disciplines need an integrated approach--especially around issues of marriage and the family; human culture; the economic, social, and political dimensions of life; the family of nations; peace. We need to develop students' ability to integrate knowledge in these areas. The team observed that an isolated theology program is irrelevant to the needs of students, that we need to provide a forum for the treatment of contemporary moral, social and political issues and a process by which students are enabled to deal with them in terms of the Gospel message.

In indirect proclamation, the College received a better rating. The team concluded from their observations that:

> The indirect witness to and proclamation of the Gospel is clearly in evidence, in fact is extraordinary, at Saint Mary College.

Examples they cited included the "person to person" relationahip between sisters and students and the witness of small group living within the religious community which students recognize as models for their own building of human community.

SMC as a Christian Community

The team concluded from their observations that at Saint Mary there is a commitment to building a community that shows itself in the availability of faculty and their concern for the development of community among themselves and with their students. Efforts at developing participative processes are to be found in the revised curriculum and the advisory system. Resident students are developing a shared appreciation and commitment to a resident student lifestyle which ought to do much to build a Christian community.

They asked the college to consider: "Given the mobility of our society, its rootless character and the growth of secularism which serve as a counterforce to religious influence, in what ways is Saint Mary College moving against these forces and building a commitment to Christian values which will endure despite emerging cultural patterns?"

The evaluators concluded that the true effectiveness of a small church-related college today depends on the institution's ability to form Christian community. Saint Mary College, in their assessment possesses to "an enviable degree" the potential to develop such community.

The team observed that apparently the administration, faculty, staff and student body have committed themselves to the basic purpose of the College. They have accepted institutional goals and have aided students to develop programs consistent with the goals. They observed further that the college has the prerequisites for a learning community--a group of persons involved in common educational enterprise with mutual understanding and commitment to goals and purposes.

The independent evaluators suggested that the college ask itself more important questions:

> Does the College own its past? Do all members recognize that the pioneer spirit should be kept alive on campus?
>
> Does the College community believe in its future?
>
> How well do the members of each unit of the college community know and value themselves as unique persons and each other as a unique gift to the whole?

If community implies sharing of gifts, of ideals and ideas, of decision-making with accompanying responsibilities and accountability, of selves--there should be horizontal sharing among all units, planned and unplanned. As a learning community, the college should improve and expand its processes for allowing this.

SMC as an Effective Educational Enterprise

The effectiveness of Saint Mary College as an institution of higher education is best judged, the evaluators assumed, by the process of self-study and accreditation. The team added that in looking at what takes place at the College--the dedication of

the faculty members, the kind of work performed in curriculum revision and the concern for student development and life-style, --"a life-giving vitality."

In examining Saint Mary as a college for women, especially in the face of enrollment difficulties, they asked: "What are the deeper, positive values in the separate education for women to which the College responds?" And concluded that if Saint Mary elects to be a college for women only, it needs to understand the values which are inherent in this structure and how those values are to be realized.

In regarding Saint Mary as a liberal arts college, they concluded that the nine institutional goals are consistent with the values of the liberal arts, and that the goal articulation process makes both student and faculty conscious of the purposiveness of the educational process.

They observed that what is being accomplished is to move course choices from a piece of paper to a dialogic process between student and advisor. The student, through this process, is being moved from a passive, compliant stance to an active involvement with her education. The evaluators saw this as a responsible way to help students get beyond information and skills to the development of attitudes and values consistent with institutional goals.

They asked us, further:

> "Where within the programs and courses in SMC's vision of the role of women in society to be found? Where does the student confront the issues to be found in a secularized society, alienation from God and religious institutions, and the issues of justice which are part of an emerging technological culture? And to what degree do we design career options so that a student will be humanly educated and prepared for a job? To what degree does the college promote realistically faith and justice?"

SMC's Contribution to the Needs of the Times

Looking at Mother Xavier Ross, the founder of Saint Mary, the team recognized one who exercised a truly needed humanizing influence in a pioneer world; who exemplified the influence of women in a changing society. They suggested that Saint Mary College has to ask itself if it is truly needed to exercise a humanizing and Christian influence in the Church and the world today. Does the college exemplify the kind of influence

religious women should exert in our changing society?

They conclude that if the College is to be useful and wanted by a broader society it must serve a need which it alone can do well; or do so fine a job, even though the need it serves is also served by other institutions, that its services are desired by a sufficient number to make the effort worthwhile.

The team also noted that Saint Mary is more than a college. It is a focal point for the religious community's influence and activity, a center for such activity. Because the college is owned and controlled by the congregation and is so set up that it is accountable to the religious congregation, the team raised questions about meaning and purpose:

- Is control or independence sought as a means for making available a resource to meet the needs of the Church and world?
- Is control and independence sought because the college is a special symbol for the religious community?
- Is control and independence sought as a means of guaranteeing that the college will be responsive to new directions of the religious community?
- Is control and independence sought as a means of preserving the financial interest of the religious community in the property?

Community Resources and Apostolic Effectiveness

The next question raised was: Since Saint Mary College utilizes the religious community's resources, both personnel and monetary resources--what justifies such an expenditure of resources?

In answering this question the team suggested that the words vision, mission and market are important for any apostolic enterprise. Vision speaks to the power of the Gospel message and the charism of the religious community; mission specifies vision to time and place and relates what we are at this point in time to the signs of the times; market brings the college into contact with "people in our path", with their needs and wants so that it may work with them to discover and apply the resources needed to meet their needs and satisfy their wants. So the test of the college's activity is threefold:

a. Does it truly reflect a Gospel vision, is it a sign of hope for mankind?

b. Does it meet the test of the signs of the times?

c. Does it center on service to the persons who are the objects of service?

A question the religious community has to confront is: When one sees the new opportunities for apostolic involvement opening to religious women, is the concentration of so many highly educated women in one activity appropriate?

Alternatives for Saint Mary College

The team proposed alternatives which could form the basis for reflective study by the community that owns and operates the college. These are not the only choices but they provide a focus on the issues and present a framework for resolution on the question of spiritual progress:

Alternative one: Saint Mary College will be an institution of higher education which will make a significant contribution to the church and to the world as a Catholic liberal arts college for women.

Alternative two: Saint Mary College is essentially a symbol for the religious community, a focus of their union, a home. Its future potential is as a Center for their activity, one part of which may be a collegiate institution.

Alternative three: The mission of the religious community is bigger than the symbolic meaning of the college. The community may need to find a life-giving expression of its mission in shift from its commitment to this apostolate.

Alternative one was suggested as the most attractive and realistic choice at present and is described in more detail.

The Vision: A humanistic education for the maturing Catholic woman that will prepare her for the emerging roles which women will exercise in our culture and within the Church.

The Mission:

I. To be a residential four-year college, serving the maturing adult woman, with a program that builds community, that is essentially humanistic but adapted to career preparation suited to student needs, that is in touch with the realities of an emerging technological culture and its effects on society, life style and morality, on the role of women and the issues it raises about responsibility, accountability and commitment, that is in touch with the realities of the Church, of liturgy and parish life, Catholic education, pray spirituality and the developing roles for women in the Church.

II. To serve also the mature adult from Leavenworth and the 50 mile radius, the military, the prisons, the diocese by the development of an appropriate program for continuing education.

This alternative is based on the assumption that a group of people who are united around vision and mission can find creative ways to make that vision and mission real.

Conclusion

The study of spiritual progress at the College evidenced that education for religious and ethical values and liberal education for full human development remain a strong foundation from which Saint Mary can continue to respond to new challenges. As new opportunities open for women within our society, the college is moving toward providing programs to prepare women for new roles of service and leadership. As life-long education becomes normative, the college is in a position to supply in-service and continuing education opportunities for personal, spiritual and professional growth to a wider clientele than the traditional college-age student.

Saint Mary's principal experience has been in the Catholic liberal arts education of maturing young women. The evidence from this study indicates that the College has been remarkably successful in fulfilling this mission. Such a mission seems more authentic than ever and the college continues to view that mission as its center, its base for continuous renewal and revitalization.

The Bowen-Minter report suggests the need for evaluation of "spiritual progress" in the private college. This case study presents one attempt in that direction: a study of the apostolic effectiveness of Saint Mary College.

Possibly any college would employ the three basic approaches Saint Mary College used in its study, i.e.

1) collection of pertinent data

2) opportunities for personal and communal reflection on the college's mission

3) use of consultants

The value of the Saint Mary Case Study as a possible model for evaluation of so illusive a goal as "spiritual progress" may be in the manner in which the consultants worked:

1) they were independent;

2) they developed criteria for evaluation from key contemporary documents that related directly to the college's nature and mission;

3) they applied these standards under four main headings that encompass the college's "spiritual life";

   a) Vital Christian presence
   b) Community
   c) Effective education
   d) Contribution to the needs of the time

4) they assessed strengths and weaknesses and suggested alternatives for future spiritual progress.

In examining some considerations relating to spiritual progress, independent colleges might find that this process of using an independent evaluation team is a model that is adaptable to measuring their unique characteristics, however different from the mission of Saint Mary College.

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